



April 25, 2009

One more day!

Greetings friends and neighbors,

What a long and emotional journey it's been! Today is day 104 of the 105 day 2009 legislative session and we're almost ready to wrap things up. Sunday, April 26th, is supposed to be the day we adjourn "Sine Die" (pronounced SIGN-ee DYE) which is Latin for "without a day." **Over the past several weeks, no one was really sure if the majority party was going to come to an agreement over their budget proposal with enough time to get it passed.** Right now, it's looking like we will indeed get out on time, which I'm so looking forward to because I miss our district, my home and especially my husband very much!

When session first started, it had more of a laid back feeling. Legislators were eager to see each other again and there was a positive feeling about getting to work on behalf of the people of our state. Now that we're getting closer to the deadline, one can really feel the tension among members. People are worried about their bills, their pet projects and are beginning to get more vocal about issues about which they feel strongly.

When a bill passes out of its house of origin (the Senate or the House of Representatives), it's sent to the other body for consideration. That body might amend the bill and make changes to it, in which case (assuming it passes the body), it is returned to the chamber in which it originated. Then the originating body decides if they agree with the amendments or not. If so, they pass the amended version of the bill and it goes to the governor for signature or veto. If not, they either ask the amending body to recede from their amendments or request that a conference committee be formed to work out an agreement. If the amending body recedes or the conference committee is successful in reaching a compromise, the bill is again passed and sent to the governor. If no agreements can be reached, the bill languishes in limbo

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until the second legislative session of a biennium, where it can be “resurrected” and the process begins anew.

The process is truly remarkable! It makes me proud to be an American as I actively participate in our democratic-republic government!

I’m also surprised by the number of shortcuts, end-arounds and flat out deception that can sometimes taint the process. For example, Senate Republicans have recommended budget solutions since early last year. Those proposals would have brought our state out of its projected \$8 billion deficit. We also called for an open and transparent budgeting process so that the public would have informed, clear access and knowledge that games are not being played with their tax dollars! Unfortunately, the majority party chose not to listen to most of our suggestions. They instead chose to hide their activities until day 103 of the 105 day session. **That’s right...two days before the end of our four month session.** The majority party finally released its compromise budget. I say compromise because majority members couldn’t come to an agreement amongst themselves on their own budget. Republicans in both the Senate and House are united against the budget proposal. It raises taxes and fees (sometimes in hidden ways), slashes programs that vulnerable people in our state depend on, makes drastic cuts to K-12 and higher education and doesn’t fund our much needed Pierce County Skills Center.



For me, it’s really a matter of priorities. Is it in the state’s best interest to take money from kids for smaller class sizes to pay for the salary and benefit increases of unionized state employees while non-union employees go without? Do we really want to eliminate the opportunity for thousands of middle class kids to attend college while the state pays for things like ice skating events? Would taxpayers really benefit from kicking Washington citizens off health care while taxpayers foot the bill to the tune of more than \$61 million for health care for illegal immigrants?

They call their budget proposal “cuts with a conscience?” **To cut vital programs and services that even members of the majority party warn will put the very lives of our states citizens in jeopardy, while at the same time shirking responsibility by forcing taxpayers to vote to “buy back” these programs with higher taxes, I say is unconscionable!**

I’ve said this before, and it bears repeating. This budget should have been written to protect the most vulnerable, be transparent and sustainable and not include any new taxes or pleas to the public for more taxes. The majority party could have easily funded many of the vital

programs they propose slashing simply by making the right choices. For example, they could have:

- Eliminated the life sciences discovery fund
- Stopped additional state spending for employee health benefits
- Eliminated state funded health care for illegal immigrants
- Frozen wages for all state employees
- Eliminated all “learning improvement days” in state schools
- Suspended state funding for all-day kindergarten, which has never been shown to be a benefit to a child’s education and has been referred to as “state-funded daycare”
- Eliminated funding for “career students” who attend many years at a higher education institution on the state’s dime, but never actually get a degree
- Reduced the number of taxpayer-funded tuition waivers colleges and universities are allowed to dole out

I’m very disappointed that a lot of the bills we’ve been hearing and voting on over the past several weeks are relatively unimportant compared to how the state is spending your money, and yet that issues seems to have faded into the background until the absolute last minute.

With the state facing a multi-billion dollar deficit, we’re given a 515-page budget at the eleventh-hour with just 24 hours to study it before we’re asked to vote on it. I’m disappointed that we haven’t sat down as a group of legislators to find a way to solve the problem in a non-partisan way. I’m bothered that instead, the majority party wants to talk about excuses to raise your current taxes and institute new taxes like a statewide income tax.

I believe very strongly in giving people choices and holding people accountable for their actions, and I don’t feel that this budget proposal does either. I’m sad to say that I’ll have to vote no when this budget comes to the floor, and I only hope that next session we can all work together to address the state’s issues. My concern is that this budget continues to spend, is “balanced” only by one-time federal stimulus money and by siphoning money from the capital budget and putting it in the operating budget. **You know, when you use one credit card to pay off another, you’re not reducing your debt!** We will be right back in the same or similar situation in two years.

Transportation budget nearly finalized

We will soon be voting on the House-Senate compromise version of the transportation budget. If it all comes together, we’ll be getting a number of projects that affect our district. Pierce County did better this year than in previous years, getting some funding from the federal stimulus package and some from the nickel and 9.5-cent gas tax increases. Projects that were planned but never started or never completed will now be able to move forward, such as:

- Funding for the Mountain Highway 304th stoplight
- Morton to Nisqually River Bridge chip and seal paving
- Replacing the Puyallup River bridge in Orting
- Yelm Loop
- State Route 7 rest area in Elbe

In closing...

If you'd like to share your concerns with me or ask me a question, please feel free to send me an e-mail to becker.randi@leg.wa.gov. You can also visit my legislative website at www.SenateRepublicans.wa.gov/Becker, where you'll find a link to my [sponsored bills](#) where you can keep track of what I'm doing. **And please consider forwarding this e-mail to anyone you think might be interested in receiving it. Ask them to contact me so I can add them to my distribution list.**

I look forward to your comments and suggestions on these issues or anything else coming before the Legislature. My office phone number is (360) 786-7602, or you can write me at 115B Irv Newhouse Building, Olympia, WA 98504. Thank you for allowing me the privilege of serving you in the Washington State Senate. It is truly an honor.

Sincerely,



Randi Becker
2nd District State Senator

